UNITED NATIONS

DP

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund

Distr.
GENERAL

DP/FPA/1999/4
3 February 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Second regular session 1999
12-16 April 1999, New York
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
UNFPA

# UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

## PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPROVEMENTS IMPLEMENTED IN THE OPERATION OF THE UNFPA TECHNICAL SUPPORT SERVICES SYSTEM

Report of the Executive Director

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report has been prepared in response to Executive Board decision 98/6, paragraph 4, which requests the Executive Director of UNFPA to submit to the Board at the second regular session 1999, a brief progress report on the effectiveness of the improvements that have been implemented in the operation of the Technical Support Services (TSS) system since the third regular session 1997.

2. The present report delineates improvements implemented in the operation of the TSS system, since the fourth quarter of 1997, by UNFPA and the TSS partner agencies and organizations. In preparing the report, UNFPA has drawn on its own experience and that of its TSS partners. Information inputs obtained from the partners have been incorporated in the report. Section II provides brief background information on how the TSS system functions; section III illustrates how UNFPA and the partner agencies and organizations have enhanced TSS system coordination; section IV discusses how interaction between the three levels of the system has improved; section V cites examples of effective advocacy being carried out by TSS specialists; and section VI consists of the

conclusion. The report has two annexes which list technical papers prepared and missions undertaken between September 1997 and December 1998 by the TSS specialists and Country Support Team (CST) advisers.

3. The report concludes by noting that interaction between TSS specialists and CSTs as well as inter-agency collaboration is more tangible now than at the time the evaluations of the TSS were conducted. While UNFPA and the TSS partner agencies and organizations do not claim to have arrived at a perfect system and recognize that there is a continuing need to both intensify technical backstopping of the CSTs by the TSS specialists and increase the systematic integration of population concerns in the programmes of TSS partner agencies and organizations, they, nevertheless, note that considerable progress has been achieved in implementing improvements in the effectiveness of the TSS system. Continued improvements will enhance the technical assistance provided to programme countries, including through greater access to state-of-the-art information, more effective application of interdisciplinary approaches, and wider access to the programmes and resources of partner agencies.

## II. BACKGROUND

4. The TSS system is a three-tier arrangement through which technical assistance is provided to countries in the areas of reproductive health, population and development strategies, advocacy and gender. The system's aim is to: improve the availability to countries of technical knowledge, analysis and research for use in population programmes; accelerate the achievement of national self-reliance through the use and development of national and regional expertise; and ensure an integrated and coordinated multidisciplinary approach to population programmes, as well as close interaction of research and analytical work with operational activities.

5. The first tier of the system is composed of national experts and consultants. The second tier consists of technical advisers assigned to eight CSTs, based in the following regions: sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and Europe. The third tier is made up of specialists posted at the headquarters or regional offices of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations regional commissions, ILO, FAO, UNESCO, WHO and UNIFEM. When national expertise is not available to meet country needs the second tier supplies it. The third tier provides feedback and technical backstopping to the second level; it also provides technical support to country activities when a request for advisory services cannot be met by the first two levels. The uniqueness of the system arises from the fact that it operates within a multisectoral, interdisciplinary and inter-agency framework.

6. The TSS system and the TSS specialists were the subject of independent evaluations in 1994 and 1996 respectively. The main conclusion of the latter evaluation was that, while the CSTs were

executing their functions at the level of expectations, the performance of TSS specialists needed strengthening, especially in the area of communication between the TSS specialists and the CSTs. In consultation with the partner agencies, including through an inter-agency meeting in May 1997, UNFPA developed a proposal to streamline the functions of the TSS specialists, strengthen coordination of the work plans of all participants in the TSS system and improve collaboration among CSTs and TSS specialists. This was presented to the Executive Board at its third regular session 1997 (DP/FPA/1997/16).

## III. IMPROVEMENTS IN THE COORDINATION OF THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT SERVICES SYSTEM

7. In January 1998, the coordination and substantive backstopping of the TSS system was one major function that UNFPA assigned to its newly established Coordination Branch (one of the three branches of the Technical and Policy Division, TPD), with a view to further improving the coordination of the TSS system. This key function of the Branch is carried out by staff with a wide range of backgrounds covering such areas as reproductive health, gender, statistics, demography, and information, education and communication (IEC), in cooperation with the other branches of TPD and other divisions of the Fund. The Coordination Branch has prepared a comprehensive strategy for its role in strengthening and coordinating the TSS system. Key aspects of the strategy and improvements deriving from it are delineated below.

8. The TSS and CST semi-annual reports and other documents are analyzed to collect lessons learned and to review the system's contribution, at the country level, to the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). As a result of this exercise an effort is under way to improve formats for reporting procedures to facilitate the review of progress and to enhance comparability of experiences in country programmes.

9. Substantive ties between UNFPA and the TSS system have been established in order to reorient the work of TSS specialists and to align it more closely with the functions assigned to the third tier of the system. As a result, access by CSTs to expertise and technical advice available in the participating agencies and organizations is increasing. The Coordination Branch staff act as focal points in mobilizing substantive technical inputs from TSS specialists and CST advisers. The Branch collaborates with TSS counterparts and CST advisers in the planning, implementation and follow-up of thematic workshops and also participates in thematic workshops and, occasionally, in the CST internal meetings and workshops.

10. The UNFPA consultant roster system is being improved to facilitate supplementing CST services with local and regional expertise and to contribute to the development of national capacity. A TSS website has been designed and established by UNFPA headquarters with links to the sites of CSTs, participating agencies and organizations, and the Population Information Network, which

is funded by UNFPA. The website constitutes a permanent virtual link between CSTs and partner agencies and organizations and provides an overview of TSS resources available at the country level for technical support, thereby contributing to further promoting the system. The site includes the *Handbook of the TSS system*, which lists all TSS specialists and CST advisers and provides information on their titles, institutional affiliation, field of expertise, educational background, languages, postal and electronic addresses and telephone and fax numbers. The site is also used to disseminate technical reports on population and development topics. Both the website and the *Handbook* are proving to be useful tools in promoting and enhancing interaction and communication between the various tiers of the system. In addition, *TSS Updates*, a newsletter on the TSS system, was launched last year to keep the Executive Board and all TSS partners abreast of progress made in various areas of the system.

11. The utilization of information technology has contributed significantly to improving communication and coordination between the different parts of the TSS system. As a result, UNFPA and partner agencies are undertaking a variety of common endeavours in a more coordinated and timely fashion, including the identification and recruitment of qualified candidates to fill vacant posts. This signals a process improvement from the time when the TSS evaluation was conducted. UNFPA and partner agencies and organizations have strengthened the coordination of the terms of reference of all participants in the TSS system in order to ensure that country needs for technical support are taken into proper account.

## IV. IMPROVEMENTS IN INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION AND IN THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE THREE LEVELS OF THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT SERVICES SYSTEM

12. Improved interaction and substantive cooperation between TSS specialists and CST advisers is increasingly evident, as is enhanced inter-agency collaboration. This collaboration has been facilitated by the adoption, in 1998, of an approach that involves a focus on key themes that are jointly selected each year. Through a participatory process involving UNFPA headquarters, the field offices, CSTs and partner agencies and organizations, the selected themes are discussed and elaborated on in joint TSS-CST thematic workshops, internal CST workshops and seminars, and in technical papers. The themes identified last year were: male involvement in reproductive health; population, poverty and environment; and reproductive health and IEC strategies. These themes cover areas of particular relevance to countries assisted by UNFPA and represent key areas in which TSS specialists must provide technical backstopping to CSTs.

13. Technical backstopping of the CSTs. The TSS specialists are becoming increasingly active in sharing with the CSTs the results of substantive work being carried out in their own agencies and organizations, thereby enhancing the technical backstopping provided to the CSTs. This includes

the provision of agency publications, recent research findings, training materials and methodological tools, and software. The TSS specialists also keep the CSTs informed about training opportunities in areas relevant to their work. In addition, the specialists are devoting more time to analyzing and providing feedback on CST mission reports and technical papers. Most TSS specialists have adopted an electronic "on call" approach and are providing rapid responses by e-mail to technical queries raised by CST advisers.

14. Thematic workshops. Organized as a collaborative venture between CST advisers and TSS specialists and UNFPA, the thematic workshops have focused on methodology and policy-related subjects. While reinforcing an understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of the issues discussed, the workshops enable the TSS specialists to better identify the backstopping needs of CST advisers. The 1998-1999 round of workshops focus on the key themes mentioned in paragraph 12, and are being organized by TSS partners, including FAO, ILO, UNESCO and WHO. UNFPA will organize a workshop focusing on building national capacity through the TSS system. The workshops include advisers and specialists from the key programme areas of reproductive health, population and development strategies, advocacy and gender.

15. Internal CST technical workshops and seminars. Specific opportunities for TSS specialists to interact with CST advisers and to become better acquainted with their needs in country situations are offered through internal CST workshops and seminars. These modalities also have the advantage of reinforcing the ties between different levels of the TSS system and among partner agencies.

16. Joint preparation of technical papers. Improved collaboration is reflected in the increasing number of technical papers drafted jointly by TSS specialists and CST advisers. These technical papers inform on population, reproductive health and gender dynamics, including by synthesizing lessons learned at the field level. The increasing interaction between TSS specialists and CST advisers also helps to ensure that multidisciplinary views and different geographic perspectives are reflected in the technical papers. A list of technical papers drafted jointly by TSS specialists and CST advisers between September 1997 and December 1998 is provided in annex I.

17. Joint missions to countries. To strengthen the training of national professionals at the country and regional levels and to ensure the interdisciplinarity of technical assistance, TSS specialists and CST advisers have undertaken joint missions to programme countries. The missions have provided valuable opportunities for exploring common frameworks, sharing work methodologies and exchanging information. A list of joint missions undertaken between September 1997 and December 1998 is provided in annex II and is indicative of the many areas in which technical assistance has been provided.

## V. IMPROVEMENTS IN ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

18. The effectiveness of the TSS system in ensuring that the population and development dimension is incorporated in the programme activities of participating agencies and organizations has increased compared to previous years. The TSS specialists are making increasing use of the Internet to advocate in favour of population issues and to disseminate papers on population topics. For example, TSS specialists regularly contribute population-related articles to SD Dimensions, a website managed by the Sustainable Development Department of FAO. The site was recently selected as the top website on sustainable development by the Lycos Community Guide, and a TSS specialist has been appointed chair of its editorial board, thereby ensuring regular coverage of population issues. A TSS specialist from UNESCO, in collaboration with the organization's Learning Without Frontiers unit, has prepared a publication regrouping the addresses of 60 selected Internet sites to facilitate rapid access to valuable sources of information on population and sustainable development issues. Another UNESCO TSS specialist collaborated with the University of Brasilia to establish a website on population education. The examples that follow illustrate recent achievements in the efforts to advocate for population concerns and increase awareness of population issues. Information dissemination has been a key part of those efforts. While there are several examples of successful advocacy work undertaken by the CST advisers, the examples that follow focus on activities undertaken by the third level of the TSS system, since the earlier evaluation had pointed out the need to strengthen advocacy at this level.

19. A TSS specialist at FAO contributed to the selection of population as a priority area of work for the FAO Sustainable Development Department for the next 15 years. At ILO, a TSS specialist was involved in a pilot activity in Uganda with the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers to introduce education on reproductive health in its training programme. This activity was financed through the organization's regular budget. Since this activity is part of a regional training project of the Workers' Activities Bureau of ILO, the experience and materials generated will serve as an example for other agricultural workers unions in the region. The TSS specialist at UNIFEM is a member of several internal committees and has used those venues to actively advocate to ensure that population concerns are reflected in UNIFEM-funded activities.

20. UNESCO has established a population education post at its regional office in Santiago, Chile. The new staff member, supported through the regular budget of UNESCO, has collaborated extensively with the CST for Latin America and the Caribbean, and extended the team's outreach and impact. In addition, at the UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok, Thailand, the librarian has been assigned responsibility for the Regional Clearinghouse on Population Education and Communication. TSS specialists have played an active role in advocating in favour of the establishment of these two posts and have contributed to the preparation of the work plans.

21. A TSS specialist at WHO participated in the development of the draft WHO policy for mainstreaming gender in the work of the organization. Two WHO TSS specialists contributed to the establishment of guidelines and training activities in the areas of prevention of violence against women, and sexual and reproductive health. Another TSS specialist prepared a framework for action planning in reproductive health and conducted a three-day workshop as part of the preparations for the XVI World Conference on Health Promotion and Education.

22. Several TSS specialists have produced papers and studies focusing on population issues. The TSS specialist at UNIFEM prepared a paper on violence against women based on the UNFPA experience in Latin America. The paper has been widely disseminated within the TSS system. FAO, using its own financial resources, has produced a comprehensive study, with contributions from TSS specialists, on the potential impact of sea-level rise on populations and agriculture. TSS specialists at FAO have played a key role in the preparation of a recent press release issued by the FAO Fisheries Department on the consequences of rapid population growth and an over-exploited environment. *The Feminization of Poverty*, a paper written by a TSS specialist at FAO, was recently published in *Population and Development Review*, a leading journal in the population field.

23. A paper on international labour migration, drafted by an ILO TSS specialist, will be published by the Poverty Research Unit of the University of Sussex, while the University of British Columbia will publish an article on the prospects for South Asian migration to Canada, also prepared by an ILO TSS specialist. At the 1998 International Labour Conference, 169 requests were received for the video on population and development "Who Decides?", produced by ILO TSS specialists. Issues of *Spotlight*, the ILO biannual newsletter on population and development, which is coordinated by an ILO TSS specialist, are widely disseminated in English and French to trade unions and employers' organizations, as well as to UNFPA and ILO personnel. *Spotlight* has featured interviews with worker and employer representatives on population and development issues. Recent issues of the newsletter have focused on such topics as labour supply and employment, reproductive health on plantations, and international migration for work.

24. UNESCO produced a technical paper entitled *Higher Education and the Population and Sustainable Development Issues* for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education which took place in October 1998, with over four thousand participants. The contribution of the TSS specialists to the paper was substantial. A UNESCO TSS specialist presented a paper at the International Congress on Fresh Water in Lebanon in June 1998 on the interrelationships between population dynamics and fresh water needs. The Man and Biosphere programme of UNESCO published a major work in 1998 on population and arid regions. UNESCO has also completed a major project called the World Population Map. The project's final publication *People on Earth* has been well-received in numerous fora and will become the basis for a new set of teaching materials. TSS specialists played a key role in the conceptualization and implementation of this project.

## VI. CONCLUSION

25. Clearly, interaction between TSS specialists and CSTs as well as inter-agency collaboration is more tangible now than at the time the evaluations of the TSS were conducted. Continued improvements will enhance the technical assistance provided to programme countries, including through greater access to state-of-the-art information, more effective application of interdisciplinary approaches, and wider access to the programmes and resources of partner agencies. While UNFPA and the TSS partner agencies and organizations do not claim to have arrived at a perfect system and recognize that there is a continuing need to both intensify technical backstopping of the CSTs by the TSS specialists and increase the systematic integration of population concerns in the programmes of TSS partner agencies, they, nevertheless, note that considerable progress has been achieved in implementing improvements in the effectiveness of the TSS system.

## ANNEX 1

Below is an annotated list of the technical papers drafted, or being drafted, jointly by TSS specialists and CST advisers between September 1997 and December 1998.

1. "Male Involvement in Reproductive Health: Incorporating Gender throughout the Life Cycle". This is one of the few studies that looks at male involvement from a life-cycle approach and that considers the male perspective in gender issues. It is an ideal model for participation of all levels of the TSS system in the preparation of technical papers.

2. "Population Education and Services in Enterprises". This study was produced by ILO TSS specialists with contributions from a CST adviser. It consists of country case studies and provides lessons learned in this area.

3. "Gender and Sustainability: Reassessing Issues and Linkages". Published by the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies in its working paper series.

4. "Unexplored Issues in Gender and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health". Currently under preparation, this study includes contributions from specialists from four agencies and the Nepal CST.

5. A training manual on gender issues developed by the UNIFEM TSS specialist and CST advisers.

6. "Communicating about Reproductive Health from a Gender Perspective". Currently being prepared by a WHO TSS specialist and an adviser from the CST in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

7. "Communicating Family Planning in Reproductive Health: Key Messages for Communicators". Prepared at WHO headquarters, with inputs from several CST advisers.

8. Indicators for population and reproductive health, jointly developed by CST advisers and TSS specialists, in collaboration with UNFPA's Coordination Branch.

9. "Adolescent fertility". Prepared by an FAO TSS specialist upon request of the CST in Kathmandu, Nepal. This paper served as a background document for the "South Asia Conference on the Adolescent".

10. An FAO TSS specialist and an adviser from the CST in Amman, Jordan, are finalizing a publication on socio-cultural aspects of female genital mutilation and cultural aspects of strategies for male involvement in reproductive health programmes.

/...

11. Five CST advisers prepared papers in the area of health promotion and education; these papers will be published in the *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*, which, for this occasion, will have a TSS specialist and a UNFPA staff member from the Coordination Branch as guest editors.

## ANNEX 2

Joint missions undertaken by TSS specialists and CST advisers between September 1997 and December 1998.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Training activities for a population and development project in Mauritius were organized by an ILO TSS specialist and a CST adviser from Harare, Zimbabwe.

A training course on gender and situational analysis of the reproductive health programme in the Comoros was conducted by a WHO TSS specialist and a CST adviser from Harare.

The status of reproductive health training was reviewed and reproductive health training curricula for health personnel designed by a WHO TSS specialist and two CST advisers from Addis Ababa during a series of regional missions.

Technical advice on the utilization of socio-cultural research for population programmes was provided by two TSS specialists from FAO and UNESCO and a CST adviser during a mission to Malawi.

Arab States and Europe

Joint TSS/CST missions were carried out to increase national capacity in the context of the year 2000 round of censuses in the region.

A project which included sampling was formulated by a TSS specialist from the United Nations Statistics Division and an adviser from the CST in Amman, Jordan, who also reviewed a survey for the Ministry of Planning of the United Arab Emirates.

Asia and the Pacific

Missions involving advisers from the team in Suva, Fiji, and specialists from the United Nations Statistics Division developed strategies for the year 2000 round of censuses in the South Pacific, including plans for common questionnaires, regional training in census management and south-south collaboration in data processing and analysis.

An FAO TSS specialist and a CST adviser from Bangkok, Thailand, collaborated on advocacy in support of population and the environment in Indonesia and Cambodia.

A "National Seminar on Migration Policy" was organized in Viet Nam with the support of an ILO TSS specialist and a CST adviser from Bangkok.

Latin America and the Caribbean

A Master's degree programme in social demography for the National University of Honduras was designed by a TSS specialist from the United Nations Population Division and an adviser from the CST in Santiago, Chile, to respond to the needs of the Caribbean sub-region.

At the Global Conference of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education in Puerto Rico, advisers from various CSTs and a specialist from WHO participated in a panel presentation on examples of effective advocacy undertaken in UNFPA-funded programmes.

Two specialists from the United Nations Statistics Division participated in a regional seminar on "Strategies for the year 2000 round of censuses", jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and the CST in Suva.

* * * * *